

## HUMANITIES INSTITUTE

Jason Zimmerman, MA

# The 39 Steps (1935)

Alfred Hitchcock

### OVERVIEW

*Director* Sir Alfred Hitchcock (1899-1980) is perhaps the best-known British filmmaker and a household name. With over 50 films to his credit, Hitchcock helped to shape the modern understanding of the thriller genre. His best-known films include *The Birds*, *Psycho*, *Vertigo*, and *Rear Window*, which have all earned accolades, including preservation by the US Film Registry. In 1960, Hitchcock was inducted into the Hollywood Walk of Fame with two stars for his work in both film and television. He was also the first recipient of the BAFTA Academy Fellowship Award.

*Film* Following on the coattails of 1934's *The Man Who Knew Too Much*, Hitchcock was primed and ready for another thrilling spy story. Filming began on *The 39 Steps* in early January 1935 at the Lime Grove Studios of Gaumont-British films. Hitchcock had fond memories of John Buchan's novel of the same name but found it a bit lacking upon rereading. Hitchcock said of the story, "So many of the scenes, which were convincing enough in print, would have looked unbelievable on the screen." This led to many changes in the final script. *The 39 Steps* is considered the most "perennially accepted" of Hitchcock's thrillers, appearing in many lists of notable thrillers and British films.

*Background* Robert Donat and Madeleine Carroll were carefully selected as leading man and lady because of their success in Hollywood. Producer Michael Balcon was hopeful that the actors' international fame would thrust Gaumont-British into the limelight in America. He spent at least £20,000 on Carroll and Donat's salaries, around half the total cost of shooting Hitchcock's previous picture, *The Man Who Knew Too Much*. We can see Hitchcock using his expanded funding well, arranging each shot as a canvas, whereas many of his releases in the early 1930s were, in his words, "a photograph of a stage play." *The 39 Steps* is an excellent case study of the director's work, containing nearly all the elements which are typical of a Hitchcock thriller, including an innocent man on the run, a MacGuffin -an object which is important to the plot, triggering action, but its form or contents remain mysterious-, a cameo of the director, and a cold-hearted blonde who becomes a damsel in distress.

### CINEMATIC NARRATION

While some attentive viewers may notice occasionally sloppy editing, most viewers will be too focused on the intense story and beautiful cinematography in *The 39 Steps*. Hitchcock uses every shot to its fullest potential, integrating creative camera movement and skillful direction of extras into key scenes, earning his title as the Master of Suspense. While some of the plot is a bit unbelievable, such as Annabella's death, Hitchcock makes even these scenes ooze with suspense and terror. The viewer is drawn in and invested very quickly without exposition.

### MAIN CHARACTERS

Richard Hannay	A Canadian national who gets caught up in an espionage operation
Pamela	A traveler who exposes Hannay on several occasions
Annabella Smith	A mysterious woman who reveals herself to be a spy
Professor Jordan	An engineer who is involved in an espionage ring
Margaret, the crofter's wife	A Scottish woman who helps Hannay escape the police
John, the crofter	A pious but abusive man who seeks to profit from Hannay's capture
Sheriff Watson	The chief law enforcement officer near Alt-na-Shellach
Mr. Memory	A music-hall performer whose skill is rote memorization

## SYNOPSIS

Richard Hannay, a Canadian visiting London, enjoys a night on the town until gunfire breaks out at the music hall where he watches Mr. Memory. A beautiful woman clutches him as they break away from the panicked crowd. She persuades Hannay to take her home with him. Back at his flat, she reveals herself to be a spy, giving Annabella Smith as her name. Later that night, she stumbles into the living room where Hannay sleeps on the sofa, uttering a warning before collapsing, with a knife in her back. He takes the map of Scotland she clutches and flees his apartment. Aboard the Flying Scotsman, Hannay evades police capture and travels through Scotland on foot. He finds shelter in a crofter's cottage for the night, although his host betrays him when the police come searching. The crofter's wife gives him a coat and sends him on his way. With the police hot on his tail, Hannay finds Professor Jordan's house and makes contact. He believes that the Professor is the agent Annabella was looking to contact. The Professor reveals that he's missing the top joints of his pinky finger, a description Annabella gave of the enemy agent trying to smuggle information out of the country. The Professor then shoots Hannay, but he survives, the bullet lodged in the crofter's pocket bible kept in the coat's breast pocket. Hannay goes to the local sheriff only to be betrayed and manacled to Pamela, a woman who recognizes the fugitive from the Flying Scotsman. Hannay pretends to have a gun, demanding that Pamela come with him and keep quiet. She escapes from the handcuffs later that night and begins to flee when she overhears two of the Professor's thugs' conversation, confirming Hannay has been telling the truth. She and Hannay make their way back to London, tracking the Professor to the very same music hall where Hannay met Annabella. In an act of desperation to avoid police capture, Hannay shouts a question to Mr. Memory: "What are the 39 steps!?" Before Mr. Memory can reveal the spy organization, the Professor shoots him, both foiling and exposing the plan before it can be completed.

## PLOT

**Music Hall-** One by one, lights spelling 'Music Hall' light up outside before a man buys a ticket. He finds his seat as the next act begins, puffs of smoke rising from nearby men's pipes. The little orchestra in front of the stage strikes up a jaunty tune as the curtains part and two men take the stage. The Master of Ceremonies introduces a "remarkable man," Mr. Memory. "Every day," he says, "he commits to memory fifty new facts and remembers every one of them." Many quips and chastizing remarks erupt from the crowd as the introduction continues.



**Mr. Memory-** "Ladies and Gentlemen," says the MC, "ask him your questions." He leaves Mr. Memory to begin his act. The first question comes: "Where's my old man been since last Saturday?" The crowd bursts into laughter. "A serious question, please," says Mr. Memory. Men begin bombarding him with questions about horse races and sports competitions, all of which he answers correctly. The man we saw enter the music hall asks a question: "How far is Winnipeg from Montreal?" Though he takes a few other questions first, Mr. Memory addresses the man and welcomes the Canadian to England before providing the correct answer.



**Fight at the bar-** Mr. Memory answers another couple of questions before a disturbance at the bar inside the music hall becomes a fistfight between a patron and a doorman. The MC returns, pleading for the violence to end as the fight becomes a sprawling brawl. A gun fires and several women scream. The gun goes off again and everyone runs for the exit. “For God's sake, play something!” the MC shouts at the conductor who get the orchestra to play the same jaunty tune from before. In the chaos, the Canadian man finds a woman in his arms.



**Portland Place-** “Well,” the Canadian man says, “there we are.” When he tries to part ways, the woman clutches his arm, saying, “May I come home with you?” The man seems amused and invites her to join him. They board a bus and make their way to the man’s apartment on Portland Place. We see the residents’ names on a board and the man changes the position next to ‘Mr. R. Hannay’ from ‘out’ to ‘in’. “Am I allowed to know your name?” he asks the woman. “Smith?” she replies with a smile. They make their way to Mr. Hannay’s flat.



**A stiff drink-** Inside Mr. Hannay’s flat, the woman asks a question, “What do you think I do for a living?” “Actress?” he replies. “Not in the way you mean,” she says and smiles. She says that she’s “freelance” as Hannay begins to apologize for the appearance of his flat. “Not yet,” she says as he moves to turn on the light. She stands near the wall by a window and asks him to rotate a mirror so her reflection can’t be seen. While her actions and requests are bizarre and she seems panicked, Hannay complies and remains friendly. The telephone begins to ring and she begs him not to answer. Once again he complies, mixing her a drink and inviting her to sit down. She quickly gulps down the large and stiff drink, shivering as she lowers the glass. “You needed that,” comments Hannay.



**Kitchen-** "I owe you an explanation," the woman begins, but Hannay interrupts, "Don't worry about me; I'm nobody." When the woman says they can't talk in the living room, they move to the kitchen. After lowering the blind, Hannay turns on the lights and offers the woman a cigarette. The phone begins ringing again. "Your friend again," says Hannay as the woman takes a seat at the table. She smiles and asks for some food. "You like haddock?" he asks as he takes a fish from the refrigerator and places it in a pan on the stove. She says she does before saying, "You may call me Annabella."



**"I fired those shots"**- When Hannay lights the stove with a match, the sudden whooshing noise startles Annabella. He asks her if she's upset about the gunfire in the music hall to which she replies, "I fired those shots." She explains that she didn't harm anyone, she fired the shots to create a diversion to escape from two men who wanted her dead. "You should be more careful in choosing your gentleman friends," Hannay jokes. She says he doesn't understand, and he comments that her situation "sounds like a spy story." "I prefer the word 'agent'," she says.



**On the street-** Hannay seems incredulous about her employment, teasing her further. Annabella responds that she works for whoever pays the most, saying she's on a mission to protect state secrets. He tries to make another snarky remark, but she interrupts, grabbing Hannay's arm to attract his attention. She explains that an enemy agent has critical state air defense secrets and is in the process of shipping them out of the country. She tracked two of his men to the music hall, but they recognized her and would have killed her. "Too bad," Hannay says as he continues preparing dinner. "Ever heard of a thing called persecution mania?" "Go and look down on the street, then," she replies. He moves to the sitting room and looks through the window. Below, two men lean against a lamp post, smoking cigarettes and casting glances up at Hannay's window.



**“The 39 Steps”**- “You win,” says Hannay as he enters the kitchen once more. Annabella laments not having shaken her pursuers before becoming serious: “I’m going to tell you something which is not very healthy to know.” She says that because he’s taken her in, he’ll be seen as involved. “Have you ever heard of the 39 steps?” she asks. Hannay guesses it’s a bar. When Annabella continues speaking about the state secrets, Hannay suggests she should phone the police. “I suppose they wouldn’t believe me any more than you did.” Hannay continues setting the table for dinner, cutting and buttering bread as Annabella continues talking about the espionage plot. The chief enemy agent, she reveals, is missing part of his right little finger. She tells Hannay she plans to eat and sleep before maybe explaining more of the situation in the morning.



**“They’ll Get You Next”**- The scene fades in on a bronze statue beside Hannay’s front door. Behind it, curtains flap in the breeze of an open window, ghostly in the moonlight. Hannay sleeping in the sitting room as Annabella enters. “Clear out, Hannay,” she cries, “They’ll get you next!” She coughs and sighs as she stumbles and slumps on top of Hannay, the bread knife from the kitchen protruding from her back. Before Hannay can process what’s happened, the phone begins to ring. He thinks to answer it for a moment but looks out the window instead. The two men from before are still there. This time, one uses a phone booth.



**A clue-** Hannay considers his next action as the phone continues to ring. We hear Annabella's voice as her profile appears on screen, repeating the words she spoke in the kitchen: "What you were laughing at just now is true. These men will stop at nothing." Hannay looks at the corpse, seeing a piece of paper clutched in poor Annabella's hand. The phone still rings. He eases it from her hand and uncrumples it. It's a map of Scotland. "Alt-na-Shellach" has been circled near the larger town of Killin. Annabella's face fades in over the map as she speaks, "There is a man in Scotland I must meet... I tell you, these men act quickly.... quickly..... quickly...."



**Milkman-** Downstairs in the lobby, wearing a dark trench coat and hat, Hannay creeps towards the front door. Outside, the two men patrol. After a moment's thought, Hannay slides the indicator next to his name to 'out' before looking back to the door. He paces, trapped. A milkman appears, delivering milk in the wee hours. "You're up bright and early," he comments as Hannay pulls him out of view of the patrolling men. "Could you use a pound note, brother?" Hannay asks, saying he wants to borrow the milkman's uniform. He then tells the milkman about the spy plot, which the milkman refuses to believe. Hannay changes tactics quickly: "Are you married?" He spins a quick yarn about the men outside being his lover's husband and her brother, which seems to amuse the milkman. He quickly relinquishes his uniform to help the faux-adulterer, asking him to "leave the pony around the corner." Hannay boards the pony cart and leaves as the milkman shouts, "Oi! The empties!" The empty milk bottles jingle in his hands.



**Flying Scotsman-** The milkman's pony cart is left in the street. The Flying Scotsman steams and hisses as it vents excess pressure. Men and women mill about on the platform, carrying luggage or entering train cars as hawkers shout out their wares and train conductors blow their whistles. Hannay sits, looking out the window of one of the cabins as the train pulls away from the station. Women wave goodbye, and several policemen roll up in a car. "There he is!" they shout as they run after the train, but not quickly enough. Back at Hannay's flat, a charwoman opens the door and screams, her cry becoming the Flying Scotsman exiting a tunnel and blowing its whistle.



**Sales pitch-** Hannay sleeps in the cabin, his head pressed against the window. The two other men in the cabin speak to each other. One man holds a suitcase on his lap as he describes the beauty and sensibility of the products he sells: corsets, bras, and hosiery. The man to whom he speaks seems very engaged but another, older man seems annoyed by the display, trying to focus on his newspaper and eventually getting up and leaving the cabin when the train stops at the station in Edinburgh. The two other men apologize for talking so much business as Hannay wakes up.



**Newspaper-** “I wonder who won the two o’clock at Windsor?” ponders the man with glasses and the salesman flags down a hawker to buy a paper. He shows some concern as he begins reading: “There’s been a woman murdered in a West end flat.” Hannay looks shocked but tries to conceal his unease. “These sex dramas don’t appeal to me. What won?” replies the man with the glasses. They quickly return to making dark jokes about the murder, however, as Hannay tries to keep his cool. The salesman is suddenly outraged, “Is there no honesty in this world at all?” Another company is selling a product similar to his at a much lower price.



**“Enough evidence there to hang any man”-** “Might I have a look at your paper?” Hannay asks. The man obliges. “Woman found dead in flat,” a headline proclaims above a picture of Hannay smoking a pipe. As Hannay reads the paper, he can see the man with the glasses looking at him, smirking. Hannay thanks the salesman for his paper and exits the train car, seeing a police officer speaking to someone, also with a paper. He approaches and overhears the police officer saying, “There’s enough evidence there to hang any man.” Despite looking at a picture of Hannay, the officer doesn’t recognize him. Hannay dashes to the train as it begins to pull away from the station.





**Police search-** Back aboard the Flying Scotsman, in the same compartment, the two men laugh with one another. Hannay sits for a moment, then stands and takes his coat, leaving as the two men stare in disbelief at his rudeness. In the aisle, Hannay leans out of the window. To his surprise, a pair of police officers stare. A porter startles him, asking if he'll be taking tea. As the train pulls onto a rail bridge, Hannay notices a group of officers file into the passenger car. He takes a chance, diving into the nearest cabin and kissing the woman inside.



**“This is the man you want”-** The woman struggles under Hannay, but the passing officers leave the two alone: “Young man having a free meal in there,” they chuckle. The woman is terrified. Hannay pulls back, apologizing. “I was desperate,” he says, trying to explain his situation. A police officer in plain clothes bursts into the cabin, asking the woman if she’s seen a man running past her cabin. She thinks, narrowing her eyes on Hannay, “This is the man you want I think.” The police confront Hannay, who smiles and deflects their questions. The porter from before returns, asking Hannay if he’ll be returning to his cabin for tea. “I’ll be right along,” Hannay says before shoving the policeman and flinging open the carriage door.



**Car hopping-** Hannay clings to the side of the speeding train, shimmying towards another cabin's door and pulling himself back inside. "Pull that cord!" an officer commands as they pile into the aisle after Hannay. The train begins to slow, its brakes squealing with effort. Hannay bursts into the dining car and is invited to sit by a nearby waiter. Hannay shakes his head and sprints through the car, nearly knocking over a waiter with a tray full of cups. The police are hot on his tail, repeatedly shoving the poor waiter as they continue after Hannay.



**Guard dogs-** A small pack of guard dogs await Hannay in the baggage car. He closes the door as soon as they start barking and disembarks. The police run into the baggage car, complaining as the dogs bark and nip at their legs. They leave the carriage and begin poking around the tracks. The train's conductor approaches, asking why they stopped the train. They reply there's a wanted man on the loose, but the conductor chastizes them, "It's against all the regulations to stop the train on the bridge!" The police board the train as it steams off, leaving Hannay in his hiding spot pressed against one of the bridge's great girders.



**News report-** The repetitive beep of a telegraph machine pecks out a message as an off-screen newspaper seller bellows the headline: "Hannay escapes!" Still off-screen, a din of street traffic fades into a police description of Hannay: "About 5'10". Small mustache. Last seen wearing a dark suit, but may have obtained a change of clothing."



**On foot-** Heavy clouds glide over the Scotland moors. Hannay walks alone along a dirt road, far from the camera. He crosses an old stone bridge and makes his way to a simple cottage. Outside, an older man, a crofter, encourages his livestock into a gated area. Hannay approaches and greets him, now wearing a light-colored suit. The crofter seems distrustful of strangers and interrogates him. Hannay responds that he's an auto mechanic looking for work. The crofter tells him there's no work in the area, but directs him to an Englishman living near Alt-na-Shellach who may need his services.



**Room for the night-** Hannay thanks the crofter for the information and says he'll try there tonight. The crofter responds, "No you won't. It's 14 miles." When Hannay notices a van and ponders hitching a ride, the crofter responds that it's headed the wrong way. Hannay then asks if the crofter could possibly put him up, and after discussing some terms, the crofter agrees. Up the hill, in front of the simple cottage, the crofter introduces Hannay to his much younger wife, who invites him in.



**Crofter's cottage-** Inside, the crofter's wife shows Hannay the closet he'll be sleeping in, asking if he can sleep there. "You try and stop me," he responds. She asks why he's on the road, and he replies that he's looking for a job before the crofter's wife excuses herself to continue making dinner. At the kitchen table, Hannay sees a paper with a headline about the Portland Place murder. He tries to remove it from under the groceries piled on top of it but gives up quickly.



**“Do London ladies look beautiful?”**- The crofter’s wife moves the paper and groceries to a nearby counter as Hannay asks if she’s lived here long. She says she’s from Glasgow and asks if he’s ever been there as she sets the table. She gushes about the modern conveniences and beauty of Glasgow before Hannay laments, “Certainly don’t get those things out here.” When the crofter’s wife admits she misses some of those things, Hannay promises to tell them all about London at dinner. She advises against this, saying her husband thinks cities are wicked places best ignored. She does ask Hannay several questions about the city, such as, “Do London ladies look beautiful?” Hannay replies, “They wouldn’t if you were beside them.”



**Crofter suspicious-** Unseen and unheard by his wife and Hannay, the crofter enters the room. He asks a question, startling them both. “I was just saying to your wife,” Hannay responds, “that I prefer living in town than the country.” “God made the country,” the crofter replies before asking his wife if supper is prepared. Hannay asks to look at the crofter’s paper, becoming concerned as he reads the story about his escape from the Flying Scotsman. The crofter sits at the table and asks Hannay’s name. “Hammond,” he replies. The crofter asks Mr. “Hammond” to put down the paper so he can say grace. Hannay and the crofter’s wife seem to have a conversation with their eyes about the murder case while the crofter prays and watches them, a suspicious look on his face.



**“Making love behind my back”**- The crofter excuses himself after the prayer, saying he forgot to lock the barn. He moves outside but heads back towards the window instead. He sees Hannay and his wife talking, but he can’t hear them. Later that night, the crofter’s wife lies in bed. Her husband watches her intently. There’s a sound off-screen and she jumps up in response, looking out the window. A car horn sounds as headlights round a nearby hill. Inferring that it’s the police, she rushes downstairs to alert Hannay. He thanks her profusely for the warning when the crofter appears. “I might have known,” he says, “making love behind my back.”



**Police at the door-** The crofter tells Hannay to get out of his house, but Hannay refuses to go, afraid the crofter will beat his wife. They begin to argue as the police car's headlights sweep across the room and the horn sounds once more. To end the argument, Hannay makes a bold decision and says, "She's helping me to escape from the police!" He bribes the crofter with five pounds to keep his presence a secret from the police. When the crofter goes to talk to the police, the crofter's wife urges Hannay to flee, giving him her husband's dark coat to help disguise him in the darkness. Before leaving, he asks her name and she responds 'Margret.' Hannay kisses her quickly as he exits, saying, "I'll never forget you for this."



**Moorland chase-** A policeman mops his brow, looking into the distance. Another group of policemen round the top of a hill in formation. "There he goes," the senior officer shouts, pointing with a cane as a figure appears on a distant hilltop. Hannay dashes past a nearby outcrop as the policemen give chase. Below him lies a manor house. Above him, an autogyro whirls in pursuit. The officers are on his heels as he tries to lose them by crossing a stream. The policemen try to cut him off but make a poor choice, entering the stream and losing their footing. Hannay uses a nearby bridge, taking advantage of the short lead he's gained.



**Alt-na-Shellach-** Across the bridge, Hannay sees a sign in front of a house, bearing the name 'Alt-na-Shellach' and continues running. A car has caught up with the policemen on foot. They signal and shout from the other side of the stream as senior officers jump out of the car to pursue Hannay on foot. Hannay sprints through the open gate of the manor he saw from the hilltop, rushing to the house and ringing the bell. He frantically spruces his appearance for a moment before a maid opens the door. When she asks his name, Hannay says, "He wouldn't know my name. Ask if he knows a Miss Annabella Smith." The police appear just as Hannay disappears inside. They ring the bell and ask the maid if she's seen any strangers, but she denies seeing anyone strange.



**A friendly drink-** Upstairs, a party is going on. Hannay speaks to Professor Jordan who grins when Hannay admits to knowing Annabella. He says they're having a few drinks to celebrate his daughter's birthday and asks to excuse himself from the party. Mr. "Hammond" meets the Professor's family when the Professor leaves to speak to the police. The birthday girl jokingly asks Hannay to 'forgive the orgy' as she introduces him to a few key guests, including Sheriff Watson. The Professor returns, tapping Hannay on the shoulder before telling him he's sent the police away.



**View from the window-** The Professor invites Hannay to look at the view from the nearby window. Outside, they see the policemen searching the nearby stream. A party-goer asks Sheriff Watson, "When are you going to catch that murderer." The party-goers all speak excitedly about the murder as Hannay and the Professor exchange knowing glances and smiles. The Professor's daughter mentions lunch, and the Professor takes the opportunity to clear everyone out of his study, leaving Hannay alone in the large room.



**A chat before lunch-** The Professor closes the doors to his study and locks them before turning to face Hannay. "I suppose it's safe to call you by your real name now," he says before asking about Annabella. Hannay responds that she's been murdered and he didn't do it. The Professor asks why Hannay has made the journey "just to tell [him] about it." "I believe she was coming to ask you about some air ministry secret," says Hannay, also mentioning the enemy agent whose distinctive feature is his missing little finger joints. The Professor raises his hand, revealing that his right hand is missing part of that finger. Hannay stands stunned as the Professor grins at him.



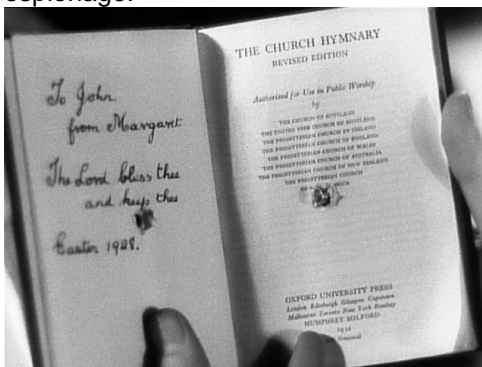
**“Too late in any case”**- The door to the Professor’s study rattles. He moves calmly to the door and unlocks it. His wife enters: “Lunch is ready, dear!” After assuring his wife he’ll be there shortly, he turns his attention back to Hannay, apologizing sarcastically for “leading him down the garden path.” Hannay agrees, saying, “It’s the wrong garden, alright. Well, what are we going to do about it?” The Professor complains momentarily, lamenting that his cover will be blown if he tries the more lenient options of dealing with Hannay. He then reveals that he’s ready to transfer the state secrets out of the country, saying, “Poor Annabella would have been too late in any case.”



**Macabre proposition**- “Seems to me,” says the Professor, “there’s only one way out...What if I left you alone with this revolver?” He draws a small pistol from his pocket and says that the newspapers would report that an infamous murderer had taken his own life. At that moment, the Professor’s wife reappears, chastizing him for taking so long. She takes no notice of the gun before asking, “Shall Hammond be staying?” The Professor responds, “I don’t think so,” before she leaves. “What do you think, Mr. Hannay,” he asks as Hannay eyes the open door and slowly moves in the direction of the door as the Professor keeps speaking. “I’m afraid you leave me no alternative,” the Professor says before he pulls the trigger. Hannay falls to the ground, dropping his still-burning cigarette.



**Sheriff’s office**- “I canne find my hymn book,” says the crofter to his wife. Margret admits giving Hannay her husband’s overcoat in which he had put the hymnal. He becomes angry and advances past the camera, striking Margret as she shrieks off-screen. The hymnal fades into view as the sheriff laughs off-screen, pulling a bullet from the middle of the hymnal. Hannay explains that he’s heard of cigarette cases stopping bullets, but never a hymn book. “Some of those hymns are terrible hard to get through,” says the sheriff before Hannay thanks him for believing his story about the Professor’s espionage.



**Arrested-** Hannay admits to some impatience regarding the Professor as Sheriff Watson calmly asks for a short statement to forward to the proper authorities. He says someone from the station next door will be over shortly to write it down before moving back to his desk. Hannay smiles, looking out the window. A group of officers burst into the room, one asking the sheriff if he had called for them. The Sheriff responds harshly, asking, "Do you think I enjoy playing for time with a murderer?" "Murderer?!" exclaims Hannay as an officer accuses him of willful murder. When Hannay attempts to plead with the sheriff, the officer interrupts him: "We're not so daft in Scotland as some smug Londoners may think." Unable to reason with them, Hannay demands to speak with the High Commissioner for Canada. As the handcuffs go on Hannay's wrist, Sheriff Watson comments that there's no need to call as he'll be in London soon enough.



**Parade-** Outside the sheriff's office, two of the Professor's lackeys pull up. Upon seeing the Professor's car, one exits the car and deduces that Hannay must be inside the sheriff's office, "spilling the beans." Hannay bursts out the window, gaining a narrow lead on the officers who were trying to arrest him. A brass band plays loudly as a group marches through the street. The back of Hannay's head appears as he marches with them. He glances to either side, looking for his pursuers as he conceals the handcuff dangling from his wrist in his pocket. The police hurry past, not so much as glancing in his direction. Hannay jogs away from the crowd and heads into a nearby alley. Upon seeing more officers, he ducks into a nearby assembly hall.





**Candidate Hannay-** A woman excitedly greets Hannay at the door. “We’re all waiting for you. This way!” she says, pulling Hannay past several other people standing around. She leads him to a stage where a man gives a boisterous political speech. Hannay slowly walks towards the people seated on stage behind the speaker, a woman nodding to him and inviting him to sit in the only free chair. The crowd begins to heckle the speaker: “We’ve had enough of you,” shouts one woman. A man with glasses steps forward and replaces the speaker, banging a gavel on the podium before comically muttering a lengthy introduction the crowd cannot hear. When he’s finished, Hannay finds all eyes are on him. He collects himself quickly and stumbles to the podium.



**Campaign speech-** Wiping the sweat from his face with a handkerchief and clearing his throat, Hannay scans the crowd. “Ladies and gentlemen, I apologize for my hesitation in rising just now,” he says, explaining that the chairman’s introduction was so flattering, he didn’t realize he was being introduced. The crowd laughs as Hannay continues ad-libbing his speech. He recognizes Pamela, the woman from the train, entering the room. She gives him a horrified look. Hannay continues his speech as Pamela speaks with several people off-stage. They don’t seem to believe her, but the Professor’s men, who enter soon after, listen eagerly.



**McCrocodile-** Hannay begins faltering in his speech as it becomes clear he doesn’t know anyone’s name. He looks down at the sign on the podium that reads ‘VOTE for McCorquodale’ and refers to the candidate as “McCrocodile.” The crowd laughs once more as he asks the crowd what topics they’d like him to discuss, selecting one and shifting to an impassioned yet meaningless speech based on his current situation. He finishes and moves away from the podium, trying to escape the Professor’s agents waiting in the wings, but the excited crowd rushes to meet him, pushing him back into their custody.



**“Difficult man to follow”**- As one of the Professor’s men grabs Hannay’s arm, he greets a man going on stage: “I kept them going as long as I could for you.” “Well,” says the politician (presumably McCroquodale), “you’re certainly a difficult man to follow.” As the Professor’s man tries to haul him away, Hannay locks eyes with Pamela, shaking his captor off to confront her. “I suppose you think you’ve been damn clever,” he spits. She asks the Professor’s man to take him away, but Hannay asks her, whether or not she believes him, to call the High Commissioner for Canada and tell them that state secrets are about to leave the country in the hands of enemy agents. Maintaining their cover as detectives, the Professor’s men ask Pamela to accompany them to the station to make a statement. They all exit the building, Hannay nodding and waving to the applauding crowd as he passes.



**Detour**- After complaining about having to sit next to Hannay, Pamela enters the car and the Professor’s men drive off. “Isn’t that the police station?” Pamela asks as they drive past. One of the men says they’re going to a large station in a different town. She complains about the distance but the Professor’s man says there’s nothing that can be done. Sometime later, the car reaches a fork in the road. Pamela notices that the driver has gone south, away from their destination. The Professor’s man explains that there’s a bridge out and this is a detour. Hannay, putting the pieces together, demands to see the warrant for his arrest. After receiving nothing but verbal abuse, he asks if their ‘sheriff’ is missing the top joints of his right little finger. This earns him a slap.



**Roadblock-** The car lurches to a sudden halt. The bleating of sheep fills the air as one of the men asks what's stopped the car. "It's a whole flock of detectives," comments Hannay. The Professor's men exit the car to chase off the sheep, but not before handcuffing Pamela and Hannay together. When Pamela complains, the man calls her a 'special constable' and tells her to stay put. "As long as I go," Hannay says as soon as the man is out of sight, "you go. Come on!" The driver calls for help as Hannay and Pamela make a break for it. Hannay strikes one man, sending him tumbling over the bridge. Pamela begins to struggle, but Hannay forces her to accompany him. They escape to a nearby road without being detected, but Pamela cries out, aiding the Professor's men.



**Waterfall-** Knowing his lead won't last long after Pamela's outburst, he drags the woman towards a nearby waterfall. Beneath it is an outcrop that conceals the two of them from sight. The Professor's thugs are hot on their tails, though they look confused. "One peep out of you," Hannay says to Pamela, "and I'll shoot you first and myself after. I mean that." The man in charge of the Professor's men tells them to stop wasting time, "Spread out and find them!"



**"White Man's Burden"**- Hannay and Pamela wander down a fog-cloaked road. "Must be a mile away by now," he comments. Pamela complains about him jerking her about and his constant whistling. She then asks what he even plans to do; he can't escape, especially not chained to her. He quips back, calling her "The White Man's Burden." She says the policemen will catch him. He agrees but corrects her; They're not policemen and even she should have figured that out by now. She expresses her disbelief in his story once more. "20 million women on this island," Hannay sighs, "and I've got to be chained to you." When his reasoning gets him nowhere, he lays the killer act on thick, reminding her that she's either trapped with a spy or a wanted murderer. "For all you know," he says, "I may murder a woman a week!"



**Argyll Arms-** Hannay's aimless whistling continues as they approach an inn. "We're going in there," Hannay commands. When Pamela complains, he reminds her once more of her predicament and how things will go poorly for her if she doesn't pretend to be his wife, threatening her with what appears to be a gun in his pocket. Pamela plays the part inside, answering the hostess' questions when prompted and even signing the book when Hannay asks her to, his hand constrained by the manacle they're trying to conceal.



**Hotel room-** The Innkeeper takes over the counter from his wife and leads Pamela and Hannay to their room, lighting candles and the fireplace for them before leaving them to settle in. Hannay pretends to help Pamela dry her clothes. She makes faces at him, pushing his hands away at first but eventually resigning. The hostess enters once more with the sandwiches they requested downstairs. She offers to take Pamela's wet clothes down to the kitchen to dry, but Pamela declines, saying they'll dry just as well in front of the fire in the bedroom. The hostess bids them goodnight and leaves. Downstairs, she gushes to her husband about hosting a couple who are "so in love."



**Hot water bottle-** Pamela struggles with Hannay at the door to their hotel room. "I can't stand it any longer," she cries, threatening to tell the innkeepers what's really going on. Hannay reasons with her, but she doesn't calm down until the hostess knocks on the door. She enters, offering Pamela a hot water bottle before turning to leave. Pamela asks her not to go, arousing the older woman's suspicion, but Hannay jabs Pamela with something in his pocket, silencing her. "We're a runaway couple," Hannay smiles at the hostess, who grins back. Clearly a romantic, she promises not to give them up to anyone who may be after them.



**Sandwiches and stockings-** “Thank God for a bite to eat,” Hannay says after the hostess leaves, practically diving towards the plate of sandwiches. He hands half the stack to Pamela and sits down on the bench in front of the bed, asking if Pamela has anything that could get the handcuffs off them in her purse. She replies that she has a nail file, and Hannay says it will have to do after a snide remark about its usefulness. He recommends that she remove her skirt as he doesn’t “want to be tied to a pneumonia case, thank-you-very-much.” She refuses to undress but agrees that her wet clothes are a concern, removing her stockings.



**Nail file-** After hanging her wet stockings and allowing her to warm up a little more, Hannay asks Pamela if she’ll “kindly lie down on the operating table.” She’s offended by the joke and he assures her that he’s not going to hurt her. She does as he asks but continues to complain. He complains back: “Do you think I’m looking forward to waking up in the morning and seeing your face beside me?” Hannay asks for the nail file and begins sawing away at one of the chains that bind them. As he works, he whistles, cursing his inability to place the tune. When he yawns, Pamela makes a comment about criminals having nightmares. Hannay quips back with a sarcastic story about his life as a ‘hardened criminal,’ still sawing away with the nail file. He jokes that she’ll be able to take her grandchildren to see his death mask at Madame Tussaud’s. Eventually, his story puts Pamela to sleep and he joins her as the candle burns.



**Professor’s house-** Back at the Professor’s house, several maids carry luggage to a waiting car. The Professor’s wife grabs his hands and asks if everything is going to be alright. The Professor assures her everything is fine and that he’ll be out of the country and away from any danger soon. He kisses his wife and one of his daughters before heading to the car outside.



**Late-night escape-** The candle burns low on the bedside table beside Hannay and Pamela. The woman comes to after a moment, smacking her lips and throwing the half-eaten sandwich in her lap to the floor. Pamela realizes that Hannay is still asleep and tries to squeeze her hand out of the manacle. After several tries, she succeeds. Hannay rolls over in his sleep and she manages to wriggle out from under him without disturbing him. She reaches into his pocket to disarm him and is frustrated to find that he's been threatening her with was only a pipe. Hurriedly now, she puts on her stockings and shoes before heading out of the room to escape.



**Thugs downstairs-** From the landing overlooking the inn's front desk, Pamela can hear a man speaking on the telephone. It's one of the Professor's men from earlier. She overhears him speaking about the very plan Hannay had told her, realizing he's been telling the truth the entire time. The innkeeper brings them drinks and they begin to question him about Hannay and Pamela. Before he can say too much, his wife appears and kicks the Professor's men out for drinking after closing time. Pamela returns to the room and shows Hannay unusual tenderness, smiling at the innocence of his sleeping face. She covers him with a blanket before retiring to the sofa. Realizing she's cold, Pamela comically steals the blanket she just covered Hannay with before falling asleep.



**Morning-** Hannay awakens and is surprised to find himself freed from Pamela. He sees the door ajar and assumes she's run off. Instead, she speaks from the end of the bed: "Morning." They smile at one another. "What's the idea?" Hannay asks, "How did we get out of these?" She admits to squeezing out of the manacles on her own while Hannay slept and tells of the Professor's men downstairs. At first, Hannay is relieved that she believes her and listens intently as she tells him what she remembers of the men's phone conversation about the 39 steps. When Pamela tells him the men left five hours ago, Hannay becomes upset. Pamela leaves, slamming the door.



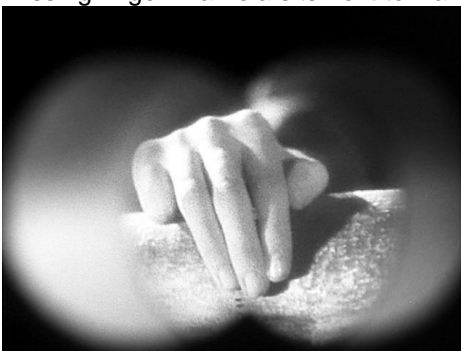
**Scotland Yard-** The camera gives us an artful -if dizzying- view of Westminster's night lights before landing on a sign reading 'New Scotland Yard.' Inside the building, Pamela paces as a ranking police officer talks on the phone. He hangs up and tells Pamela that she's "quite right" that the air ministry has a new toy, but they believe their intelligence is secure. Pamela is outraged, but the officer assures her there's no issue. "I'm wasting my time here," she says, heading for the door. The officers stop her, asking where Hannay is. She responds that she doesn't know and leaves, but the officers send someone to tail her, believing she'll lead them to Hannay.



**London Palladium-** Electric lights spell out 'London Palladium - Crazy Month.' Pamela exits a taxi and rushes inside. Two policemen exit their taxi and follow her in. Pamela looks all over for Hannay inside the theater as the performance continues, patrons laughing at the performer's slapstick antics. In a back alley, a van unloads a dozen or so officers who file toward the theater. Backstage, a sergeant commands them to watch every exit and to let no one leave. The band begins playing a jaunty tune as the players start tap dancing. The onlooking officers seem just as amused as the music hall patrons.



**Opera glasses-** After talking her way past the doorman and further searching, Pamela finds Hannay seated among the crowd. The officers tailing her move away to talk to their counterparts, reporting that she's seen Hannay. Meanwhile, Hannay borrows some opera glasses from a lady next to him and lays eyes on the Professor seated in a box beside the stage, confirming it's him by identifying his missing finger. Pamela sits next to Hannay and reports her failure at Scotland Yard.



**The tune-** In the lobby, the officers ask their commanding officer if they should act or wait to apprehend Hannay until after the show. He motions for patience. Hannay is deep in thought, trying to figure out why the Professor would be here if there were no missing state secrets when the band begins to play a familiar tune. He grins and elbows Pamela: "You hear that tune? It's the damn thing I couldn't get out of my head!" He recalls Annabella that the band had been playing the same music when he met Annabella but is interrupted as the curtain parts and the Master of Ceremonies begins speaking.



**Mr. Memory returns-** The master of ceremonies repeats the introduction from the beginning of the film as Mr. Memory takes the stage. "It's the same little man!" Hannay exclaims. Using the opera glasses, Hannay looks closely at Mr. Memory's face. He sees the man look up toward the Professor's box. The Professor draws a pocket watch and dangles it over his hand. Mr. Memory nods. "I've got it," Hannay whispers excitedly, "All the information's in Memory's head!"



**"What are the 39 steps?"-** Mr. Memory begins his act as Hannay continues to explain his deduction to Pamela. Before he can finish, a woman appears and says, "Some men would like to speak with you." The officers stand in the aisle. Hannay and Pamela move towards them and one of the officers asks if he is Hannay. "There's something you've got to understand," he pleads with them. The officers, however, don't listen and try to detain Hannay. Desperate, Hannay lurches towards the stage, shouting, "What are the 39 steps?" Mr. Memory looks shocked but answers, "The 39 steps is an organization of spies collecting information on behalf of the foreign office of..." Before he can finish, a shot rings out.





**“Biggest job I ever tackled”**- Mr. Memory stumbles, clutching his stomach, as the music hall patrons shriek in horror. The Professor stands in his box, the smoking gun in his hand. Cornered by policemen, he jumps from the box to the stage in an attempt to escape. He’s quickly detained by a crowd of uniformed officers, however. The stage manager tries to tend to Mr. Memory who sinks to the floor, dying. A group of dancing girls take the stage in an attempt to placate the frightened guests as Hannay asks Mr. Memory what was the secret he held. “Would it be alright, me telling you, sir?” Mr. Memory asks, “It was a big job to learn: The biggest job I ever tackled, and I don’t want to throw it all away.” Hannay assures him it’s alright, and Mr. Memory begins to recite the specifications for an airplane engine that he was ordered to memorize. The camera pulls back, and we see Hannay and Pamela grasp each other’s hands, the manacle still dangling from Hannay’s wrist.



## THEMES

**Identity/Appearance** As a spy thriller, identity plays a critical role in the plot of *The 39 Steps*. Annabella’s true identity goes unknown throughout the film as we can tell she’s giving Hannay a false identity. She is as she appears, a spy, despite Hannay’s disbelief. Hannay changes costume several times to conceal his identity. These moments vary from putting on a different colored suit to borrowing the milkman’s uniform and cart. Because of the vagueness of Annabella’s description of the “man in Scotland” she must “meet,” Hannay assumes she means that the Professor is an ally. When the Professor shows Hannay his missing finger joints, he cements his identity as the enemy agent. Pamela refuses to believe Hannay is anything besides a murderer at first. Hannay plays on the mistaken identity of murderer in an attempt to control her with fear to some success. When she overhears the Professor’s men on the phone, she realizes Hannay has been telling the truth, softening her perception of the man as seen in her tender treatment soon thereafter. Heading back to London, both Pamela and Hannay accept their new identity as agents, even though they’re not official, and try to stop the Professor from stealing state secrets as no one else believes them.

**Trust/Disbelief** Trust and disbelief drive the story of *The 39 Steps* from beginning to end. Annabella shows incredible trust in Hannay when she asks to go home with him and then lets him in on the plot. Hannay repays her with disbelief and sarcastic comments at first, though the men looking up at her apartment persuade him to heed Annabella’s warnings. After Annabella’s murder, Hannay shows trust in her as he picks up her mission with little hesitation. Just as Hannay first did, the milkman, Pamela, the sheriff, and a multitude of others refuse to believe Hannay’s warnings of an espionage plot. Pamela eventually changes her mind after being kidnapped by the Professor’s men and overhearing their telephone conversation at the inn. Similarly, many characters refuse to believe Hannay is anything other than a murderer. The officers who confront him at the end of the film are fixated on capturing the murderer Hannay until the Professor shoots Mr. Memory.

**Tenacity** Grit is a major theme in most of Hitchcock’s thrillers, usually portrayed by the protagonist. At the film’s beginning, Annabella shows great tenacity when she fires off several rounds in the music hall to create a distraction. This shows her dedication to her mission. When she is murdered by the Professor’s men, Hannay takes up her mantle, partly to escape the same fate and partly because he believes he owes it to Annabella for not believing her at first. Thinking quickly, Hannay disguises himself as a milkman to evade capture and boards the first train for Scotland. He shows his tenacity during the police search of the Flying Scotsman when he evades police capture by jumping out of the carriage while the train is at full speed and then clinging to the bridge to hide. His tenacity never ceases as he tirelessly works to foil the Professor’s scheme. In her refusal to cooperate, Pamela shows similar grit, though Hannay does force her to comply with his will through threat and physical

strength. Together, they foil the Professor's plan to smuggle state secrets out of the country, despite all odds.

## CHARACTER ANALYSIS

**Hannay** Hannay is a Canadian visiting London on business. He runs into Annabella after the gunfire in the music hall and she accompanies him home. When the beautiful spy is murdered in his home, he must flee to escape murder charges and complete the mission she was on.

*Intelligent* Hannay is incredibly smart, using every opportunity to his greatest advantage. He first avoids pursuers by bribing the milkman for his uniform and cart. Then, he avoids the police by kissing Pamela on the Flying Scotsman (though this distraction backfires when Pamela reveals him). He shows his intelligence once more during his escape from the train when he backtracks and avoids the guard dogs in the baggage car. The police are held up just long enough for him to find a hiding spot among the bridge's support struts. Similarly, when he and Pamela are left alone with the driver when sheep block the road, Hannay uses the confusion to make a successful escape attempt. The only time we see his intelligence falter is when he assumes that the Professor is an ally, and this nearly results in his death. By using his head and keeping a step ahead of his enemies, Hannay is successful in stopping the enemy agents from carrying out their mission.

*Sarcastic* Hannay, like most of Hitchcock's protagonists, has a caustic wit. He uses it indiscriminately from the beginning. Annabella faces his scathing remarks when she tries to tell him of the espionage ring known as the 39 steps, Pamela earns his sarcastic ire when she treats him as a simple murderer, and his various captors feel his sharp tongue at every turn. Much of the film's comedy comes from Hannay's wit. He refers to Pamela as "the white man's burden," quoting the title of an influential poem by Rudyard Kipling. He also manages to lighten the mood during his many captivities by making jokes and snide remarks.

*Calm* Even in the most tense moments of the film, Hannay doesn't lose his head. When Annabella is murdered in his apartment, he is shocked but acts rationally. He deduces that Annabella wanted to travel to the town circled on the map of Scotland and quickly evades the Professor's men waiting for him outside using charm and wit. When the police search for him on the Flying Scotsman, he remains calm and evades them. His calmness and posh appearance grant him quick entry into the Professor's house, but his calm fades when he realizes the Professor is the enemy agent Annabella warned him about. His calm serves him as he evades police by marching among the crowd in the parade and then as he pretends to be a politician. One of his final acts in the film comes from a lapse in calm at the London Palladium when police attempt to take him into custody. He shouts a question for Mr. Memory, "What are the 39 steps!?" Although coming from desperation, this act causes the Professor to shoot Mr. Memory and foil his scheme.

**Pamela** Pamela is a young woman who we first meet on the Flying Scotsman. It's unknown why she's traveling, but she appears once more at the political rally where she's taken into the custody of the Professor's men. When she learns that Hannay hasn't been lying about the espionage plot, she becomes a loyal ally and helps him to stop the Professor's espionage.

*Willful* Pamela is shown to have a strong will from her introduction. When Hannay kisses her in the Flying Scotsman, she becomes rightfully upset. Although she doesn't push the stranger away when he kissed her, she willfully gives him up to the police as revenge, refusing to corroborate his cover story. Her strong will flares again during their chance encounter at the political rally. She recognizes Hannay and tries to alert the people running the event. When they don't believe her, she turns to the Professor's men who've adopted the disguise of police detectives. Through her willfulness, Hannay falls into their custody. She shows her willful attitude several times when she is Hannay's captive, especially when she alerts the Professor's thugs to their location and tries to expose Hannay to the hostess at the inn.

*Attentive* Pamela is incredibly attentive. She notices details that nobody else seems to note and is very in tune with people. Although her grudge against Hannay for his uninvited kiss on the Flying Scotsman clouds her judgment for part of the film, she becomes quite attuned to Hannay, helping to take care of him and figure out the mystery of the 39 steps. She notices several times that the Professor's men, then disguised as detectives, have driven away from where they said they were

going. While she believes the false officers over the accused murderer Hannay, Pamela is less sure about the men's identities with each detour. She becomes even less sure when one of the men chains her to Hannay to keep him in the car. This plan fails and results in Hannay's escape when he forces the woman to follow him from the car. Her attention to the phone call the Professor's men make at the inn results in her changing her mind about Hannay. Without Pamela's attentive nature, the 39 steps would have succeeded in their plot to steal military secrets.

*Cooperative* Although Pamela can act unhelpfully in moments of duress, she is ultimately quite cooperative. Even in her time as Hannay's unwilling captive, she proves cooperative after Hannay's threats by pretending to be his wife. After she learns the truth about the 39 steps, she proves to be a helpful ally in Hannay's quest to stop the Professor. She returns to Hannay after learning the truth about the espionage, caring for him in his sleep. While Hannay is upset about the time they've wasted sleeping, her newfound cooperation and concern for his well-being have netted them valuable sleep. It can be argued that this helped Hannay piece together the mystery at the Palladium. In London, she acts as an intermediary between Hannay and the police, bringing them information about the espionage plot. Although this leads police to Hannay at the Palladium, it shows her willingness to cooperate with both Hannay and the police.

**Annabella** 'Annabella Smith' is the pseudonym of a freelance spy working for the British government. She's learned of a plot to smuggle state secrets out of the country and is killed before she can stop the enemy spies. Although she is killed early in the film, Annabella has a major impact on the plot and Hannay.

*Trusting* By going home with Hannay, Annabella shows great trust. He could be an enemy agent, but she trusts that he's not. Even though she knows the way she's acting seems bizarre, she trusts Hannay to do as she asks and provide her with food and shelter. Annabella continues her trend of trusting Hannay by telling him a vague description of the espionage plot and the enemy agent that she seeks to stop. Her trust has a limit: she gives Hannay a pseudonym and doesn't tell him everything he should know about the mission. This shows that even though she's capable of great trust, there's a limit to what she will reveal to a stranger.

*Aware* As any good spy should be, Annabella is incredibly aware. She knows she's been followed even though she hasn't seen anyone yet. She shows this first in Hannay's apartment when she presses herself against the wall and asks that he turn a mirror around. Doing so prevents the Professor's men from seeing her. Without looking herself, she can inform Hannay where the men following her are positioned on the street. In Hannay, she sees great intelligence and a potential ally. Although she speaks in vague terms, she tells Hannay of the spy plot she must stop. She knows that Hannay is smart enough to figure out her mission and leaves him a clue in the form of the map of Scotland clutched in her hand. Her dying act sends Hannay on a quest to complete her mission to clear his name.

**The Professor** By all appearances, Professor Jordan is a wealthy English engineer living in the Scottish countryside. He has a dark, and vague, secret: he is an agent of a foreign power. The spy seeks to smuggle military secrets out of the country and will stop at nothing to do so.

*Planner* The Professor is an enigmatic character, but he does prove himself to be an excellent planner. His plan begins sometime before the film when secret files are taken from the air ministry and given to Mr. Memory to memorize. Utilizing the man's infallible memory and his traveling act as a cover, the Professor seeks to remove the state secrets without the government's notice. Only Hannay's determination and some blind luck stand between him and the completion of his goal. When he leaves for London, he seems sure of his plan as he assures his wife that he will be out of danger very soon. Even as Hannay foils his plan at the film's end, the Professor hatches a quick plan to stop his organization from being exposed, shooting Mr. Memory and attempting to escape. We can surmise that the meticulous Professor has some scheme to kill himself in custody, further denying his captors any useful information even though he is captured by the police.